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RR RUEHIC  
DE RUEHB #1526/01 3171729  
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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9685  
RUEAUSA/HHS WASHDC  
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 001526

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KFLU AEMR ASEC AMED CASC KFLO TBIO KSAF KPAO PREL

PINR, AMGT, TF, BE

SUBJECT: BELGIUM: H1N1 REPORT: NUMBER OF ESTIMATED CASES FALLS SIGNIFICANTLY; TOTAL DEATHS NOW ELEVEN

REF: BRUSSELS 1509

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SUMMARY

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**¶1.** On November 12, the Government of Belgium's Interministerial Influenza Commission (IIC) announced a significant drop in estimated H1N1 cases, with 29,744 estimated cases from November 2 to 8 (week 45), compared to 47,448 for the week of October 26 to November 1 (week 44). Three deaths were reported in week 45, bringing to 11 the total of H1N1-related fatalities in Belgium since the outbreak began in April 2009. Authorities conjectured that the decline in cases may have been due to school vacation and foreign travel, but were reluctant to draw conclusions from the drop in cases, citing the need for more data. The fall in cases came one week after Belgium saw a slowing of the rate of increase in estimated H1N1 cases in week 44, following six consecutive weeks where the rates of incidence approximately doubled, albeit from a small base (see paragraph 7 for cumulative weekly figures). The country's vaccination program for health care and education workers and members of risk-groups continues, with approximately 1.5 million doses of Pandemrix, the GOB's sole choice of vaccine, so far having been made available via general practitioners. Health authorities have not yet announced when additional vaccines may become available to the larger population. End summary.

Week of November 2 to November 8 (week 45)

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**¶2.** Along with the drop in estimated H1N1 cases, there were fewer cases of patients with flu-related symptoms making doctor visits reported during the week. The IIC press release with Belgium's latest figures refrained from drawing conclusions from the fall off in cases, saying it was too early to comment and that it would be necessary to monitor cases over time. The country remains in phase one of an epidemic, according to the Belgian Scientific Institute Public Health (BSIPH), with still just a small portion of the public believed to have been exposed to the virus (152,748 estimated positive cases according to BSIPH figures, from a total estimated population of 10.4 million). The IIC reported there were three additional H1-N1 related fatalities during week 45, but offered no further details; the total number of deaths linked to H1N1 is now **¶11**. The IIC indicated that the country's mortality rate has not been significantly affected by the H1N1 virus.

Week of October 26 to November 1 (week 44)

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**¶3.** Although the 44,448 estimated positive cases in week 44 represented an absolute increase over the previous week's 39,367 cases, it marked the first time in six weeks that the number of estimated cases had not doubled. The IIC announced one additional H1N1-related death sometime during week 44, but gave no further details.

Week of October 19 to October 25 (week 43)

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¶4. Besides the 39,367 cases estimated that week, the IIC announced two deaths, of a 43-year old woman and a 75-year old man. Both had been hospitalized with serious respiratory problems. No further details were given.

IIC ANNOUNCES H1N1 VACCINE PANDEMRIX SAFE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

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¶5. On November 3, the Interministerial Influenza Commission announced in a press release that the Influenza Scientific Committee and representatives of Belgian gynaecologists had agreed that the Pandemrix H1N1 vaccine purchased by the GOB was safe for use by women in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy, and that women in that key group should receive the vaccination on a priority basis. Before the announcement some press coverage had been raised from some quarters about the suitability of the vaccine (which contains adjuvants) for pregnant women. Pregnant women and women undergoing medically-assisted procreation programs, medical professionals, those over six months with at-risk medical conditions, and parents with children under six months are currently able to receive the vaccine free of charge via local general practitioners (reftel).

EMBASSY H1N1 WORKING GROUP

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¶6. The Embassy H1N1 Working Group (comprised of representatives from the Front Office, Health Unit, Management, Consular, CLO, RSO, PD and POLECON sections) reviewed Embassy preparedness in light of Belgium's H1N1 situation on October 28 and September 29. The working group will continue to meet at regularly scheduled times

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(the next meeting is set for November 19) and on an exceptional basis if the situation warrants.

¶7. BELGIAN H1N1 CASES (ESTIMATED UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED\*)

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| WEEK | DATE | NUMBER CASES | CUMULATIVE |
|------|------|--------------|------------|
|      |      | NUMBER CASES |            |

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|    |              |        |         |
|----|--------------|--------|---------|
| 45 | NOV 2-NOV 8  | 29,744 | 152,748 |
| 44 | OCT 26-NOV 1 | 47,448 | 123,004 |
| 43 | OCT 19-25    | 39,367 | 75,556  |
| 42 | OCT 12-18    | 16,255 | 36,189  |
| 41 | OCT 5-11     | 7,477  | 19,934  |
| 40 | SEP 28-OCT 4 | 3,997  | 12,457  |
| 39 | SEP 21-27    | 1,753  | 8,460   |
| 38 | SEP 14-20    | 911    | 6,707   |
| 37 | SEP 7-13     | 462    | 5,796   |
| 36 | AUG 31-SEP 6 | 402    | 5,334   |
| 35 | AUG 24-30    | 539    | 4,932   |
| 34 | AUG 17-23    | 966    | 4,393   |
| 33 | AUG 10-16    | 995    | 3,427   |
| 32 | AUG 3-9      | 687    | 2,432   |
| 31 | JUL 27-AUG 2 | 851    | 1,745   |
| 30 | JUL 20-26    | 507    | 894     |
| 29 | JUL 13-19    | 387    | 387     |

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(source: Belgian Scientific Institute Public Health, Brussels)

\*total of individuals testing positive during that period

(Note: Belgium ceased individual testing for H1N1 in mid-July 2009, and since then has used extrapolations from a system relying on data based on cases of patients who visit the approximately 180 doctors

who make up the so-called national H1N1 network.)

GUTMAN